

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Brown University

Application ID: 14AC156127

Program Name: College Advising Corps

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

Strengths:

The applicant provides solid comparative data showing the relationship between bachelor degree attainment and median income for both the U.S. and Rhode Island.

The applicant provides strong supportive data showing disproportionate numbers of low income and minority students enrolling in and completing college in Rhode Island.

The applicant cites current state (Rhode Island) and local (urban Rhode Island) data in the college-going rates of students, especially students from lower-income and minority households. They provide data further indicating that college completion rates are related to other longer-term social and economic outcomes, such as unemployment and poverty-levels. The challenge posed is how to increase college-going and retention rates among students, especially those from under-represented populations.

The applicant clearly demonstrated the need for support and resources to low income students regarding higher education.

The applicant demonstrates the effectiveness of AmeriCorps members by referencing previous years' successes including meeting or exceeding their targets for number of students completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and number of students accepted into an institution of higher education.

The applicant demonstrates a strong plan to recruit AmeriCorps members who are best able to serve and relate to the target population such as locally graduating students and first-generation college students.

The applicant has administered this intervention for seven years, and has the staff, procedures, training, and other aspects of the implementation plan well-developed at this point.

The data collection methods and the database they have developed are strengths of this proposal, and will allow them to analyze one of their stated outcomes, i.e., which activities best contribute to pathways to college.

The College Advising Corps uses a customized in-house Excel tool to capture and analyze activity and outcome data in the program. This includes outcomes from site visits, interviews of staff, and focus groups of students and parents. The data collection tool allows for day-to-day and longitudinal program data collection as well as self and group assessments and bench marking. The tool assists Americorp members to track services, follow up, and monitor critical deadlines; therefore allowing them to use the data to target students who are not receiving other college access services and follow up with students who are approaching an important deadline.

The applicant provides compelling details to show it has successfully operated the proposed intervention for the past six years including number of students counseled, number of students submitting a FASFA, number of students applying to colleges and number of students accepted.

The applicant has met or exceeded previous performance targets and provides persuasive evidence to support this claim. For example, the applicant exceeded its target number by 273 for students accepted into institutions of higher education.

The applicant clearly demonstrated the need for support and resources to low income students regarding higher education.

The applicant's outcomes included the following: The College Advising Corps assisted more than 20,000 high school students in preparation for higher education since inception of the program in 2007.

Data from previous years indicate that the applicant has met their enrollment and other targeted performance measures. In the current grant cycle (2011-2014), for example, the CAC has met or exceeded all performance targets.

Since its inception in 2007, the College Advising Corps has impacted more than 20,000 high school students.

Since 2011, the CAC has enrolled 100% of its AmeriCorps slots and successfully retained 100% of its members.

Weaknesses:

The applicant provides very limited details when describing the specific needs in the communities to be served by AmeriCorps members. For example, the applicant does not list cities/communities to be served nor did the applicant provide any city specific economic data such as poverty rates, unemployment, etc.

The applicant cites statistics showing that lower-income, under-represented minority students are less likely to attend and graduate from college. However, it is not clear how these particular groups of students will be targeted in the proposed program, except for the statement that entire schools (not individual students) will be selected based on proportion of under-represented and low-income students. (It is also not clear how the comparison schools will be selected.)

It may also be the case that lower-income, minority students have lower college-going rates due to factors other than

advising and mentoring. Specific statistics showing a link between enhanced advising and college attendance rates in this population are not provided, although a finding from the Rhode Island KIDSCount study is referenced.

The applicant provides very limited details when describing the specific needs in the communities to be served by AmeriCorps members.

It is not clear how the effectiveness of the intervention will be tested. The evaluation plan, for example, does not describe the comparison group (if any), nor other measures to demonstrate program effectiveness.

The applicant lists five program impacts: college enrollment, factors affecting pathways to college, impacts on school culture, whether parents are meaningfully engaged, and impacts on members' attitudes and life choices. The evaluation, however, does not clearly describe how each of these outcomes will be evaluated. The last two outcomes (parental engagement and impact on attitudes and life choices) are not stated in terms of the evaluation strategy.

Past compliance concerns addressed the issues of member files. It was indicated that member signatures on self-appraisals, time off, and consent forms were missing in some files. This documentation is relevant in the program record keeping and human resource systems.

Details on how the site visits will enforce concerns raised by past reviews were not provided (e.g., missing data from member files, and ensuring AmeriCorps identity is visible).

The applicant identified compliance concerns and made changes to ensure quality and success of the program. This included implementing comprehensive file reviews and requiring AmeriCorps members to wear pins for identification purposes.

Addressing the applicant provides very limited details when describing the specific needs in the communities to be served by AmeriCorps members.

Details on how the site visits will enforce compliance concerns raised in past reviews (e.g., missing data from member files, and ensuring AmeriCorps identity is visible) were not provided.